

Chapter 12B -- Back to Tennessee and back to Georgia

Jenkinsburg didn't turn out to be heaven, but it could have been worse. Father had been sought for the job because he had a reputation as a disciplinarian, and one was needed. His predecessor had carried a shotgun to school to defend himself against the big, strong boys who threatened to beat him up. Father carried only a leather strap. I don't recall there having been more or more severe whippings than were usually expected in that day, but even boys bigger than he never dared disobey him to his face.

Walter and I were frequently threatened by boys near our age and size, but nothing came of it, and peace gradually returned.

The American Tract Society had offered a prize of \$1000 for the best novel on a religious theme, and Mother expanded a short story she had previously sold into a book titled "Miss Phena." It didn't win the prize, but was published and brought her some fan mail. She hastily tried another, but it never saw the light.

Walter and Shirley, both in the Tenth Grade, graduated from high school that year, though he was only sixteen. The other memorable thing I recall is that in the woods below the school there were more azaleas than I ever saw anywhere else. But one of the troublemakers was the son of a school trustee, and that meant moving again.

Our next school was at Bethesda, in beautiful Middle Tennessee. The village had two churches, two stores and a blacksmith shop, and was about fourteen miles from Franklin, the county seat and nearest railroad town. We reached it by a hack, and found

there was no place to stay or to eat; but we were given food and shelter by the Presbyterian minister, M. W. Millard, until we could arrange to board with a farmer until our goods arrived. Then we moved into a vacant farmhouse, a mile from the village.

We quickly discovered that we were in horse country; almost half the scholars lived in the countryside and rode or drove to school, where a long row of stalls had been built. At noon the larger boys would ride the horses half a mile to the creek for water, and Walter soon became an excellent horseman. Father bought a buggy and harness and an old sorrel race horse named Bob, which had only one fault: he hated to let any other horse pass him on the road, and Mother and Shirley sometimes had some difficulty holding him back.

Our house belonged to a man named Bond, one of a large and influential family in the area. They were also widely known for their cured hams and bacon, which they sold at fifteen and twelve cents a pound, respectively. We attended the Presbyterian Church and learned part of the Shorter Catechism. The parson was also a bee-keeper, maintaining about 125 hives, and sold honey at \$1.10 a gallon -- the ten cents being for the bucket. We certainly ate well.

On Feb. 29, 1916 there was a snow of about six inches -- the heaviest of the winter, and the last Walter and I were to see until October, 1928, while studying in Upstate New York.

We had moved in time to raise a garden, but had to hack out a path through poison ivy. I was still going barefoot, and got the worst case of ivy poisoning, of my life -- at least up to today.

At Bethesda Walter and I learned to play Roll-A-Hole, one of the two great marbles games I've known, which could become very complicated. The other, which we had played in Kentucky was Big Nickel, a ring game, but a far cry beyond the simple things currently being played in national contests.

That summer we moved again, to Whitesburg, Georgia, about fifty miles from Atlanta. Father, Mother and Shirley were to teach in a fairly large frame building, once a Methodist academy called the Hutcheson Collegiate Institute. Walter and I got the job of sweeping and oiling the floors, and building fires in the stoves in cold weather, for a total of \$4 a month. Later on Walter got the job of teaching a one room school at Banning, a mile away, a cotton spinning mill town. We lived in a big frame house, the school's former dormitory.

During the two years we stayed there electricity came to the village, and we helped wire the house and school. Walter had bought a 10-volume set of Hawkins' Electrical Guides, a very useful set, and studied it all the way through. I got through Volume One, and perhaps a bit farther.

In the spring of 1917 came the war -- World War I -- and Mother and Shirley kept busy knitting socks and sweaters. Even Walter and I knit some wash cloths. That summer a young dentist with a commission was put on reserve and came home. He organized a bunch of us boys into a sort of home guard unit, and taught us how to drill, infantry style. But we never got sworn in.

In January came a sleet so heavy the ground was coated with ice for two days, and school had to be dismissed. But the big excitement for me came early the following summer on ~~the day of~~ fasting and Wilson's day of prayer for victory. Father had answered an ad, and a young man came down from Atlanta with a slightly used Chevrolet Four-Ninety, which we bought. I had been so hungry I thought I'd die, but after it hove in sight I never thought of food till next morning.

That summer we moved to Bishop, Georgia, near Athens, making our first long trip by auto -- about 130 miles. Father, Mother and Shirley taught, and later Walter taught a one-teacher country school. Mostly, Walter and I picked cotton at a penny a pound, and he worked sometimes as suction pipe man at a cotton gin. The big events of the year were the armistice in November; ~~#6#3#~~ the flu epidemic, which missed us; the introduction of the "hot dog," and my first glimpse of planes flying overhead. We were close to the ~~Chattahoochee~~ ^{Chattahoochee} River, and sometimes got up early to fish and have breakfast on its banks.

Next year we moved seven miles across the river to Bostwick, where Father, Mother, Shirley and Walter taught, and I was janitor. ~~3534343444~~ The law had been changed, so they needed new certification, and we went to the County seat, at Madison for the examination. Having gone along for the ride, I took it too. We all passed, and at 15 I was the proud possessor of a state high school and supervisory certificate, qualifying me to hold any school position I could get.

Trouble had been brewing, and when school was out Father reluctantly sold the car and left. We four stayed and tried to make a living by writing, all but me with some success, not much. But the Whitesburg school was still open, Father was willing, and Shirley coaxed Mother into giving the marriage another try.

So back we all went to the big house at Whitesburg, and for a year things seemed pretty hopeful. Next summer Shirley went for a summer term at Georgia State College for Teachers at Mill-edge ville, and made a big hit. They offered her a full scholarship, which she wanted to take, but Mother talked her out of it. At 23, Mother felt, she was still too young to face the wicked world.

She was also offered a job as organist and choir director at a big church in Savannah, but Mother still wouldn't untie the apron strings. Shirley might have died an old maid if a bald young Campbellite preacher hadn't come to town# with a tent, organized and built a church, and stayed to preach a while.

She, Mother and Father stayed another year to teach. Walter went for a course at the Illinois College of Photography, and I got started writing for a few engineering magazines, doing one story that got me listed in the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, something I didn't achieve again for 35 years.

And in the spring of 1922 the family broke up for good.